

Getting to "Y"....

Students Bring Meaning to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

"This process makes the data come alive, with students who are engaged in making choices between risky and healthy behaviors. The students doing the analysis were energized by the discussion - pushing beyond the numbers to find their true meaning and exploring the implications of this".

*Bob McNamara, Superintendent
Washington West Supervisory Union*

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Student Analysis project, funded by the Department of Education, is an opportunity for students to take a lead in bringing meaning to their own YRBS data and to take steps to strengthen their school and community based on their findings. There is a wealth of information in this bi-annual report, but what it does **not** include is a thoughtful and informed analysis of "Y" young people are making either wise or unwise choices, and what "Y"outh believe would change these statistics for the better.

Over the past two years, leadership teams of students and teachers at nine Vermont high schools have participated in this new initiative. These teams have first received training to organize a day retreat to analyze the data, producing a "Student Executive Summary". This executive summary identifies three strengths, three areas of concern and a preliminary plan of action, based on an exploration of root causes of the concerns. They then host a Dialogue Night to share the "Student Executive Summary" with the greater community, and lead meaningful multi-generational discussions. Finally, they combine all that they have learned to frame next steps, which the group implements in second half of the school year.

This newsletter tells the story of the work of the 2008-2009 school sites at the mid-year point: Mount Mansfield Union High School, Peoples Academy, Vergennes High School, South Burlington High School and Mount Abraham Union High School.



**S. Burlington Data
Analysis Retreat**

Mount Abraham Union High School Bristol

Five Mt. Abraham students, MacKenzie LeBeau, Avanleigh Cota-Weaver, Aliza Kamman, Katelynn Sawyer and Garan Wilson, took the lead in organizing both the full day student analysis retreat, held November 4, and the Dialogue Night, hosted on December 4. They have been supported by Sharon Koller, S.A.P Counselor, and Strategic Prevention Grant Coordinator Ena Backus.

Strengths:

1. Students are involved in community service and feel like they have a voice in the community.
2. Smoking is considered unappealing.
3. Students don't feel direct pressure to drink.

Concerns:

1. 40% of students are trying to lose weight, but only 13% are overweight.
2. Younger students are having more sex. The percentage of students in grades 8-10 who have had sexual intercourse has increased from 17% in 2003 to 27% in 2007.
3. Less than half of students feel that they matter to people in the community.

"When I sat down to look at the results...I realized that it was way more important than a joke. There's so much to learn from the survey results. There's so much we can change".

Aliza Kamman

NEXT STEPS...

The committee presented their findings and ideas to both the school board and then to the full faculty. They are addressing the weight issue by 1) working with Teacher Advisors to institute an intramural activity program during TA time, and 2) working with the Consumer Science teacher and graphic design class to develop educational posters and information about healthy eating and healthy bodies. Junior and senior volunteers are working with the health teacher to create a curriculum regarding sexuality for middle and 9th grade students. They will use the advisory time to lead discussions about healthy relationships and sexual activity. They also have proposed a school theater group create a production on healthy relationship choices. A "Teen Log" highlighting all positive activities teens are involved in is going to be submitted to the local newspaper, with the hope that it will be published directly across from the police log. It will serve as a means to address the students' sense that they are not valued by community. Finally, a graphic design student is creating "good news" posters highlighting YRBS strengths and a teacher is looking into purchasing a wii system.



YRBS Analysis Retreat

"The students took on full leadership and direction of the retreat". Sharon Koller



Garan Wilson, MacKenzie LeBeau & Aliza Kamman facilitating analysis retreat.

Peoples Academy Morrisville

The Morrisville Union Bank board room provided an ideal setting for Peoples Academy's first YRBS analysis retreat, held on October 28. Abby Fitzgerald, Sara Jones and Katelyn Dewey anchored the planning efforts, in partnership with SAP counselor Drew Farrell. Work time around the corporate board table was balanced by good food and energizing activities.

Strengths:

1. 86% of students have an adult they feel they can go to for advice or help.
2. A majority of students are very physically active (53% were active for 60 minutes or more every day for past 7 days.)
3. High frequency of use of protection during sexual activity (Males 80%; Females 94%)

Concerns:

1. High percentage of students offered, sold or given illegal drugs at school
2. High amount of students reported driving while intoxicated (9% during past 30 days & trend is increasing over time)
3. Number of students having sexual intercourse within the past 3 months with multiple partners.

Next Steps... The Dialogue Night has been set for March 5 and the committee is busy developing strategies to assure a good turnout.

We can change the numbers" Abby Fitzgerald said. Sara Jones completed her thought by adding, "Try to make a difference."

A break...and a challenge!



PA Principal Phil Grant listens to Body Weight & Nutrition Group



Small group data analysis – identifying strengths and concerns.



South Burlington High School

The South Burlington High School Team dedicated October 26 to their data analysis retreat day. This was quickly followed up by their November 11 Dialogue Night, which drew 250 participants – an equal balance of youth and adults. Mariah Larkin, SAP Counselor, worked with Karen Krupa and Paige Driver through the challenging organizational phases of both events.



Karen Krupa & Paige Driver facilitate the data analysis process.

The key to having students attend (the dialogue night) wasn't my raffle prizes, but rather a handful of teachers who followed my suggestion of offering extra credit or homework points. THIS is what motivated students to attend.

Mariah Larkin SAP Counselor

Strengths:

1. Students said their parents think it is wrong to smoke cigarettes.
2. The percentage of students using steroids remained the same from 2005-2007 at 2%
3. The percentage of meth use has gone down 2% in two years.

Concerns:

- 1, The percentage of student who rode in a car driven by someone who had been drinking
2. Only 38% of students in last year's senior class **had not** used marijuana
3. Ecstasy, cocaine and other hard drug use is on the rise and a growing problem among students.

Next Steps:

1. Form a SADD Chapter – implement Red Ribbon Campaign
2. Explore possibility of a parent/adult group to support SADD efforts
3. Improve communication between school and parents



Exploring root causes of major concern areas.

A little "Red Light" to get energized



Mount Mansfield Union High School Jericho

The Mount Mansfield Union team appreciated the generosity of the Best Western Inn in Burlington, where they hosted their day- long analysis retreat on November 10. Under the able leadership of the core planning team, Hannah Schultz, Taylor Willey, Lauren Barone, and JP Dubuque, the group identified the following:

Strengths:

1. Seatbelt wearing by adults and teens in the community is high (96% average)
2. Nutrition in school lunches is a high priority, with a salad bar recently introduced.
3. There is a low percentage of physical violence in students ages 13-18.

Concerns:

1. MMUHS has the highest vehicle fatality rate in all of New England. Kids are buckling up but not driving safely.
2. Sexual behavior of 8th graders (14% had sex by the age of 13)
3. Exposure of students 8th grade & younger to outside influences of sex, drugs, alcohol, etc.

Their February 3rd Dialogue Night drew approximately 30 community members and sparked deep discussions regarding the students' identified strengths and concerns.



Participants discuss the YRBS Student Executive Summary Findings



Student facilitators summarize participant recommendations

Next Steps: The team is going to finalize an extensive list of recommendations developed during Dialogue Night. One next step is to explore the mutual interest of the VTLSP group, the Teen Traffic Safety group and the Community Partnership in addressing a number of the identified action steps, given a shared mission.



Grace Ekwuabu (left), MMU adult YRBS project coordinator, helps facilitate the discussion

Vergennes High School

Nate Kittridge, Vergennes High School's new Prevention Specialist, appreciated the opportunity to dive into his work with this highly energized group of 10 students. Margaret Ottinger (SAP Counselor) attended the first fall training, but waited until Nate's arrival to initiate this project early in the new year. They hosted a separate full day training for the students, who are now currently planning their analysis retreat. They also discussed ways to advocate with students to take the YRBS survey seriously this year, understanding how valuable the data is. Stay tuned....

SAVE THE DATE!!

FRIDAY, MAY 29
VERMONT COLLEGE
MONTPELIER, VT

This is the 8th Annual Vermont Rural Partnership state-wide conference. Youth voice and leadership, and civic engagement are always the theme. This year, the YRBS Project will be featured in two morning workshops.

You will also be able to share both an identified strength and a major concern with Vermont's new commissioner of Education, Amando Vilaseca. We hope that each team will be able to send two students and an adult to share all that you have accomplished in your YRBS work this year!

For more information about this project, feel free to contact Project Coordinator Helen Beattie at hnbeattie@aol.com or (802) 472-5127.

The YRBS Student Analysis project is made possible by the Vermont Department of Education with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information contact Kate O'Neill at Kathryn.oneill@state.vt.us or (802) 828-5151.